

# Washington Wildlife Conservation Strategies

## WDFW Species and Habitat Goals:

- Protect a full range of fish and wildlife diversity
- Maintain healthy fish and wildlife populations and habitats
- Recover endangered and threatened species
- Provide sustainable harvest of game and commercial species

Washington's diverse topography, exposure to Pacific Ocean currents and weather patterns, and location on the migratory path of many wildlife species make it one of the most biologically diverse states in the nation, encompassing seacoast, shrub-steppe, native prairie, parts of four major forested mountain ranges, and Puget Sound.

In fact, Washington contains most of the major ecosystem types found in the western United States, including two found nowhere else in the world: the Olympic rainforest and the channeled scablands of eastern Washington. These landscapes and the biological diversity they support are contained within nine continental ecoregions that extend from the Pacific Northwest Coast and Puget Sound in the west to the Columbia Plateau and Northern Rocky Mountains in the east. Washington's ecoregions are defined by similarities in flora and fauna, resulting from similar soils, geology, hydrology, and landforms.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has a responsibility to protect this unique legacy. The conservation strategies outlined in this brochure are integral to the preservation of our rich natural heritage for current and future generations.

For more information, contact:  
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
600 Capitol Way N, Olympia, WA 98501  
[wdfw.wa.gov](http://wdfw.wa.gov) (360) 902-2515



# State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy

In 2000, Congress established a new Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program to help state and tribal wildlife agencies address the unmet needs of wildlife and associated habitats, for conservation, education and wildlife-associated recreation.

To be eligible for these federal grants, each agency must develop a state Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy to be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by October 2005.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is currently developing a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy in partnership and consultation with other government agencies, nongovernment organizations, and the public. Washington's strategy will be a statewide, landscape-based effort that addresses future conservation of all the state's fish and wildlife--with a focus on species and habitats in greatest need of conservation. In developing this strategy, the Department of Fish and Wildlife will incorporate information from other inventory and planning efforts, including ongoing ecoregional conservation assessments and subbasin plans.

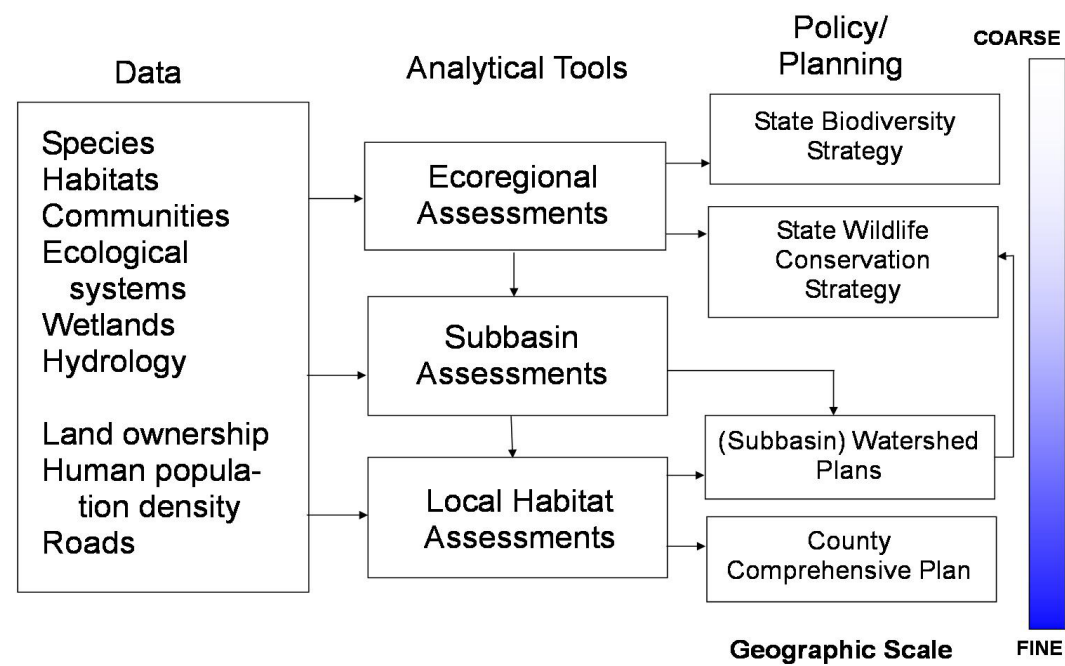
The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is working in partnership with The Nature Conservancy on assessments of nine ecoregions that cover the entire landscape of Washington. These ecoregional assessments identify sites and landscape features that are important for conserving the full range of the state's biodiversity. They do not replace individual species recovery plans or management plans for harvested species, but are designed to ensure that the highest priority biodiversity sites are identified and protected first.

The ecoregional assessments compile existing biodiversity information, conduct a spatial analysis, and design alternative conservation portfolios for sites and landscapes of high priority. Data are compiled and analyzed for species and habitat types, as well as land ownership and other geographic features. Species and locations are rated for their habitat quality and suitability for conservation. These data are then analyzed with a computer algorithm that allows scientists to optimize the selection of preferred conservation areas. Terrestrial, aquatic and marine conservation portfolios are developed for expert review by scientists from agencies, tribes, academic institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. Nine ecoregional conservation assessments covering Washington state will be completed by 2006.

The Department will use ecological assessments to guide habitat protection, influence management of public lands, assist counties in land use planning and guide priorities for grant programs.

## Ecoregional Conservation Assessments

## MULTI-SCALED PLANNING AND CONSERVATION



## Subbasin Planning

Subbasin planning is a process coordinated by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council as part of the Council's 2000 Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program. The Council was created in 1980 by Congress to give the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington a voice in how the region plans for its energy needs, while at the same time mitigating the effects of the hydropower system on fish and wildlife in the Columbia River Basin.

The Council's 2000 Program included a new project review and selection process that relies on the development of local subbasin plans to guide project funding. Subbasin plans are being developed in most of the Columbia River Basin's 62 tributary subbasins through an open public process that includes the participation of state, federal, local and tribal governments, landowners, and other stakeholders. In the future, implementation and funding of the Program will be directly linked to subbasin plans, since the plans will become part of the Council's fish and wildlife program.

Each subbasin plan includes an assessment of historical and existing conditions, with identification of significant data gaps and future information needs; an inventory of past and ongoing fish and wildlife projects as well as programs undertaken by counties, state and federal agencies, tribes and other entities; and a 10- to 15-year management plan that includes a vision, biological objectives, strategies, and recommendations for research, monitoring, and evaluation.

# Washington Biodiversity Recommendations

The 2002 Washington Legislature enacted Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 6400, which mandated, among other things, improved coordination of public and private biodiversity information and conservation actions. The 2002 legislation was recommended by Defenders of Wildlife, implemented by The Nature Conservancy, and supported by a number of state and federal agencies (including the Department of Fish and Wildlife), Indian tribes and conservation organizations.

Under contract to the State, The Nature Conservancy of Washington convened a public/private biodiversity committee to review existing public and private programs and develop recommendations for a state biodiversity strategy by October 2003. The resulting 2003 Biodiversity Conservation Strategy Report includes recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for a standing biodiversity council, an integrated data management system, a public education and outreach program, more technical assistance to local governments, and a series of new landowner incentives. In March 2004, Governor Gary Locke signed an Executive Order establishing a standing Washington Biodiversity Council, and the Legislature subsequently appropriated funds to the Council to begin implementing the recommendations included in the October 2003 report.

## Local Habitat Assessment

Local communities have an important role in wildlife conservation. Counties do growth management planning; administer the conservation futures and open space property tax incentive programs; and support local conservation districts, land trusts, and watershed councils that provide assistance to private landowners. As Washington communities take a more active role in planning their futures, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife is striving to provide more comprehensive fish and wildlife information in formats that are useful for local planning and that address broad-scale land use issues.

The Department currently maintains a list of Priority Habitats and Species, which gives counties data on the location of priority fish and wildlife habitats as well as habitat management recommendations. But the current PHS approach does not address larger landscape issues such as habitat connectivity, prioritization of habitat areas, cumulative effects of development, or multi-county habitat coordination. This project will increase the Department's capability to help local governments connect sites of ecoregional importance with habitats of local significance.

The local assessment is a Geographic Information System-based procedure that integrates, synthesizes and models existing data and information such as vegetation and land cover maps, Priority Habitats and Species, ecoregional assessments and state Natural Heritage locations to produce digital maps that portray the relative importance of habitat across the landscape.

Understanding specific habitat function within the broader landscape can better inform land use decisions, and projecting future habitat conditions will help local decision makers to understand where habitat is likely to be lost or gained under various land-use plan alternatives.